

AGRICULTURE: PRODUCTION

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the surface; it is skimmed and placed in another pot, where it hardens to shea-butter. The residue of the pure fat¹ is used as a fuel for the Nupe clay lamps.

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Oil-palm

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This grows in the thick groves near watercourses and, covering a larger area, in the dense forest country round Yeti, in the north of Nupe, which is inhabited by the Kusopa, the Keepers of the Forest. The Kusopa of Yeti are accorded a position somewhat similar to that of the kola-nut planters of Laboži. They too are regarded as 'experts' from most ancient times, and their chief holds the title *Yikunu Dzuru*, 'Oil-palm', as a symbol of his tribe's close association with the tree.¹ But they are 'experts' on a much smaller scale and claim no monopoly with regard to the products of their trees. Moreover the palm-oil produced in Kusopa country plays an unimportant part in the economy of Nupe at large. It contributes only very little towards the needs of the country, and palm-oil has to be imported regularly—and has most probably been so imported for centuries—from the south, i.e. the great oil-producing countries in the forest belt. The export of palm-kernels from the Emirate is negligible. The fruits of the palm-tree are plucked by the men, who climb up the trees with the help of a hoop made of supple boughs, and throw the fruits on the ground. They are later collected by the women. The manufacture of oil from the palm-kernels is women's work.

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The kernels of about twenty fruits are extracted and then boiled in water for one day. They are left to cool overnight. Next morning they are placed in a mortar, and the women knead the soft mass by treading on it. Later, cold water is poured over it, and a first oil comes to the surface. It is skimmed and boiled again, in another pot. The oil which now appears on the surface is the pure palm-oil, *emi dzuru* (lit. red oil). The residue is dried in the sun, later kneaded again in a mortar, and finally boiled. From this boiling a second, less pure, oil is extracted, called *edi*. Twenty palm-fruits give two small pots of pure palm-oil (about 4 gallons).

Palm-oil plays an important part in the Nupe household; the pure palm-oil is the chief ingredient in all soups and sauces which are eaten with the universal Nupe dish porridge-and-fish and porridge-and-meat. The less pure oil, which is gained as a second extract, is used for cooking yam, potatoes, and beans, but also serves—a rather indiscriminate ingredient—as a hair-lotion, ointment, laxative, and lamp-oil. On the Nupe markets only the pure 'red' oil, not the whole fruit nor the less pure second extract, is offered for sale.

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As palm-oil is also used in the preparation of native soap we may add the description of this process; it is again women's work. Water is filtered through hot wood ashes, collected in a pot and boiled. In another pot a bowlful of palm-oil has been prepared. To this an equal amount of boiling ash-water is added. The mixture is again boiled, and is constantly stirred till it hardens. This mass is left to cool, and is afterwards kneaded into large balls. The quality of the soap depends on the purity of the oil used.

¹ The Kusopa of Yeti are also said to 'cultivate' the oil-palm. What this term implies in reality, and how far it refers to real tending of the trees, weeding, thinning out, &c., I cannot say, not having been to Yeti myself.

[I.e. of the shea-nut rendering - Analyst]

326 screen another man is sitting, who works the bellows. The bellows are of the split-bag type common in Northern Nigeria; they are made of two bags of goatskin which end in a clay tube and are worked with sticks fixed on the top of each bag. The clay tube is buried in the ground and, passing underneath the screen, ends in the shallow furnace on the other side. In this furnace charcoal is burned, which the blacksmiths make themselves. They also forge their own working tools (apart from a few European tools, hammers and files, which have strayed into some of the blacksmiths' huts): a club-shaped hammer, a long pair of tongs, and a few chisels and pointed rods. The anvil, too, is of their own production; it is a solid piece of iron, shaped like a toadstool, the foot of which is buried in the ground. Of other working implements there is a bowl of water in which the red-glowing iron is tempered, and a heap of fine ashes in which the finished product is left to cool.

The technical process is simple. The bulk of crude iron is held over the fire until it becomes red hot and pliable. It is then placed on the anvil and gradually hammered into shape. The change from furnace to anvil is repeated several times, until the object has been given its final shape. Sometimes it is finished off with the help of files and chisels. The main products of the Nupe blacksmiths to-day are blades for hoes, bush-knives and crude axes, big nails and hooks for the big plank doors of the Nupe houses, and small brackets used in canoe-building. Sometimes the blacksmiths also make the wooden handles for hoes and axes; sometimes the customers prefer to buy only the blade and to make their own handles. One man, I found, can produce two hoe-blades a day, working from 9 a.m., with a pause for the midday meal, till 4 p.m., when the Nupe working-day finishes.

Iron-work thus involves four subsidiary forms of production: the manufacture of the bellows, of charcoal, of the tools, and finally of the raw material used in blacksmith work, i.e. the mining of iron ore. With the exception of the last all are undertaken by the blacksmiths themselves. The blacksmith buys the goatskins on the market and sews them together into the skin-bags used as bellows; he also produces the mouthpiece of clay for the bellows. Ordinary tools, such as hammers and tongs, are made by every worker individually; should it become necessary, however, to replace the anvil, the whole group of blacksmiths in the quarter (forty in all) would have to work together.

326 In charcoal-burning two or three men who share the same workshop
372 work together, and produce a store which is to last the whole workshop for some time. Charcoal is burned in a clearing in the thick bush at some distance from farms and habitations. Wood of two different kinds may be used. Pieces of timber of about arm's length are piled 3 feet high. A thick layer of grass is placed on the top, and the whole heap is covered with sand, leaving only a small hole open. A dry piece of wood is lit and pushed into the opening to kindle the fire inside, after which the hole, too, is covered up, and the heap is left to burn for five or six days.

326 The production of the raw material of blacksmith work deserves special description. Formerly all iron used in blacksmith work was